CHARLES E. SCHUMER
NEW YORK

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 11, 2005

Hon. David M. Stone
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
Office of the Administrator
601 South 12th Street
Arlington, VA 22202-4220

Dear Administrator Stone,

I write to call your attention to a dangerous hole in our nation's aviation security system and to recommend steps the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) can take to rectify this frightening situation.

I applaud the steps TSA has taken since the September 11th attacks. In particular, the advent of terrorist watch lists and no-fly lists, such as Secure Flight, have made it much safer to travel by plane. But this is no time to let our guard down, and I urge you to take immediate action to close a dangerous loophole in the security check process at our nation's airports.

Terrorists could exploit this loophole to evade detection at our nation's airports, and all it takes is a stolen credit card and a home computer. The scam is frighteningly simple.

First, a terrorist uses a stolen credit card to purchase an airline ticket and a boarding pass on-line. Assuming the name on the stolen credit card is not on Secure Flight or one of the others terrorist watch lists, the terrorist would be able to purchase the ticket without raising a "red-flag" on any watch list. He would then receive a ticket and a boarding pass, which he could print at home from his computer.

Second, using his personal computer, the terrorist makes a copy of the original boarding pass and doctors the copy, replacing the name from the stolen credit card on the boarding pass with the terrorist's name. He now has two boarding passes – the original with the name from the stolen credit card on it, and the fake with the terrorist's name on it.

Third, the terrorist brings both passes to the airport.

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Fourth, he proceeds to the first security checkpoint, located at the head of the line, in front of the magnotometers. As you know, an airline employee – not a TSA official – is stationed there to check the traveler's boarding pass against a government issued identification card. As part of this scam, then, the terrorist presents his fake boarding pass, bearing his name, and his own ID card, also bearing his name, to the airline employee. Since the airline employee does not scan the barcode on the ticket, which would reveal the identity of the name on the stolen card used to purchase the ticket, and only checks the name on the identification with the name on the fake boarding pass, the terrorist is able to proceed to the magnetometer undetected.
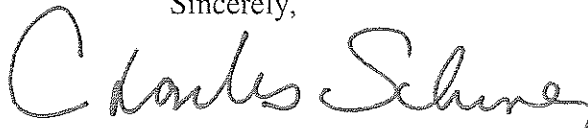
Fifth, at the gate, airline employees are not required to check a traveler's photo identification. This omission allows the terrorist to present the original boarding pass and the ticket with anyone's name on them. Here, the terrorist would show the original boarding pass and ticket, bearing the name on the stolen credit card used to purchase the ticket. The airline employee will see that the name on the scanner and the name on the boarding pass match and will then move the passenger along, even though the terrorist's own name did not appear on either document.

To close this dangerous loophole, I urge you to require airline employees stationed at the gate to check every passenger's ID against the passenger's face and his boarding pass and ticket. This simple step, required immediately after September 11th but now no longer practiced, would prevent a terrorist from boarding a commercial aircraft.

This measure would make flying safer, while not significantly impeding the flow of air travel or restrict the consumers' ability to purchase tickets and boarding passes on-line.

I look forward to a response and appreciate in advance your prompt attention to this serious matter of national security. Please call Joshua Vlasto on my staff at (202) 224-4960 should you require any additional information.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer
US Senator.